Cultivating a Shared Approach for Advancing Health and Equity in the Antelope Valley

“What does it take to advance health and equity in the Antelope Valley?” was the question that was on Michelle Kiefer’s mind, Executive Director of Antelope Valley Partners for Health (AVPH). With support through Kaiser Permanente’s Community Benefits grant, AVPH knew the time was ripe to build upon the good work that was already happening in the Antelope Valley by further engaging community partners across the region to advance a shared vision for health. In 2015, AVPH engaged Prevention Institute to help them do just that by supporting AVPH in its second annual Wellness Symposium. The Symposium marked the start of a yearlong training and consultation effort with Prevention Institute—a process that allowed stakeholders and key partners to work together in prioritizing community-level conditions and develop strategies for collective action. This work represents a promising model for catalyzing change at the local level, grounding community in prevention-based strategies as key drivers in advancing health in the Antelope Valley region.

Community Snapshot
Nestled between the Tehachapi and San Gabriel Mountains is the Antelope Valley (AV), characterized by rolling hills and a vibrant landscape that is often referred to as the high desert. The Antelope Valley in recent years has become a commuter community to the Greater Los Angeles Area just less than 80 miles away. Due to soaring housing prices in the Los Angeles Area, many families are being rapidly displaced from their Los Angeles homes and are seeking affordable housing and stability in the Antelope Valley. With the rapid transformation and influx of new families in the AV region, community conditions—the places where people live, work and play—continue to pose challenges for both new families and longtime residents. Even though close to 70 percent of residents are within walking distance to their local park or playground, more than half of youth disagree that their nearby park is safe at night. Roughly half of adults also report feeling unsafe in their neighborhood, and lack of transportation options in the Antelope Valley limits residents’ ability to get around in their community safely.

There is growing recognition that community-level conditions are key drivers in shaping health—an emerging area of focus that has caught the attention of health care providers, policy makers, grassroots organizations and community leaders working together to improve health outcomes in the AV region. One non-profit group leading this charge is Antelope Valley Partners for Health (AVPH). While AVPH has been dedicated to addressing the health and wellness needs of the community since its inception in 1999, its focus began to shift from a traditional health services model to an approach that recognizes the role of the community environment in shaping health outcomes. AVPH understands the value of increasing capacity of local organizations and engaging with community to address the root causes of health to advance health equity.

Laying a Foundation: Prioritizing Community-Level Conditions to Address Health and Equity
AVPH’s second Annual Wellness Symposium in 2015 sparked an opportunity to articulate connections between multiple areas of health and explore strategies at the community level to address inequities.

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1 California Health Interview Survey. (2007).
Prevention Institute’s (PI) emphasis on moving beyond changing individual behavior, bringing in non-traditional partners, and creating systems change for the broadest and most sustainable impact aligned with AVPH’s vision to create healthier communities - a core ingredient of the Symposium.

In October 2015, the AVPH Fall Wellness Symposium brought together close to 300 attendees from multiple sectors across the Antelope Valley region - including schools, businesses, local government, health practitioners, community members, grassroots organizations, and faith based groups. PI delivered a keynote tailored to address key health priorities in the Antelope Valley, deepening participants’ understanding of a prevention-based community health approach to reducing inequities introducing THRIVE: Tool for Health & Resilience In Vulnerable Environments.

PI facilitated an in-depth workshop with participants to evaluate each of the 12 community level factors identified in THRIVE. Participants divided into the groups aligned by sector to assess community conditions using THRIVE, prioritize them for action, and identify near term strategies that can be taken to move these priorities forward to improve their communities. Post-session, AVPH reviewed and synthesized the highest prioritized community level factors by each sector group to demonstrate key issues that are most important to address in the Antelope Valley with the goal of increasing health, safety and equity. Four community level factors were selected, including; 1) Developing social networks and trust; 2) Addressing the look, feel and safety of the community; 3) Advancing living wages and local wealth; and 4) Increasing education.

The THRIVE workshop at the Symposium provided a foundation for future action planning. Building from the four community level factors prioritized at the Symposium, AVPH consulted with PI to provide training and support to a smaller subset of key stakeholders part of the community wellness collaborative. PI developed a two part training series to support the community wellness collaborative to develop community health priorities into actionable strategies, and determine a collective, multi-sector approach for achieving health and equity.

Advancing Collective Strategies for Primary Prevention

In April 2016, PI conducted the first of two trainings with approximately 40 participants selected by AVPH. This smaller subset of individuals, who had attended the Symposium, represented a range of sectors from the Antelope Valley – including individuals from local government, faith based institutions, city council, community based organizations, and schools. Participants self-selected workgroups organized by each of the four community health priorities. PI assisted workgroups in refining each of the selected community health priorities and helped workgroups clarify their vision, direction and goals. Next, participants were introduced to Prevention

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-Participant

![Image of working goals for each group](image_url)
Institute’s **Spectrum of Prevention** tool - moving participants beyond the perception that prevention is merely education to an approach that integrates comprehensive strategy development coupled with interdisciplinary collaboration. Using the Spectrum, workgroups identified a set of preliminary strategies and activities at each level in alignment with each workgroup’s priorities and goals. For instance, the Education workgroup suggested a breadth of activities to develop schools as community hubs, such as increasing peer-to-peer learning to enhance social connectedness and establishing joint use agreements with community partners to share facilities. Likewise, the Living Wages workgroup proposed forming small focus groups with community, churches, and local businesses to assess local opportunities for increasing living wages, developing incentive programs with local businesses that have adopted fair wage practices, and aligning interests with other coalitions to advocate for a local business policy that addresses equitable pay.

The Spectrum of Prevention tool resonated with participants. Nearly all participants indicated they could refine specific objectives and directives that relate to advancing community determinants selected previously in their community, and were able to identify multiple levels of intervention using the Spectrum to formulate a comprehensive approach to addressing health and equity in the Antelope Valley. As one participant pointed out: “Even though I have seen and read the Spectrum of Prevention, listening to [the] description with examples and actually using it in my group brought its usefulness to life for me.”

In the months to follow, PI coordinated subsequent meetings in between the two trainings with AVPH to offer feedback and further strengthen goals and activities affiliated with each level of the Spectrum of Prevention – with a particular focus on the development and implementation of community-wide policies and practices that would advance health in the Antelope Valley – for each workgroup. Simultaneously, AVPH garnered additional responses from the collaborative’s participants in the months leading up to the second training to ensure that goals and activities were reflective of community health priorities.

PI conducted the second training to explore opportunities to engage multiple sectors, departments and agencies that are essential to advancing each workgroup’s strategies and actions. Prevention Institute’s **Collaboration Multiplier** was examined to allow individuals to assess the strengths, skills and resources that their organization contributes to accomplish comprehensive prevention efforts. In workgroups, participants assessed the differences in skills, resources, mandates, and interests among multiple sectors and partners, and aligned various partner contributions to develop joint strategies and cultivate shared goals to maximize impact of their goal(s) and activities.

Participants shined a light on the usefulness of Collaboration Multiplier, noting that the tool helped them learn a new way of problem-solving that can be applied to any initiative. One participant mentioned, “the whole process began to come together for me as an ‘aha moment’ during our last session in September, when we discussed how partnering with others, sharing outcomes and using the Collaboration Multiplier method can produce greater insight and impact.” Resoundingly, participants
shared their excitement for collective brainstorming, highlighting that “the ideas that come forth were more powerful than what any of us would imagine on our own.”

Reflecting on a Process: Fostering Future Directions

The yearlong training efforts came full circle when PI was asked to conduct a panel discussion at AVPH’s Fall Wellness Symposium in 2016. The panel consisted of four participants from the community wellness collaborative to better understand strengths from the planning process, lessons learned, and opportunities for future development.

Panelists spoke highly of the trainings and planning process. One panelist mentioned that “it was exciting to see the commitment and interest in moving forward to action steps” and another panelist noted that their “‘aha [moment]’ was about the realization that working toward improving health equity in the community has the potential to be much more effective when we approach it collectively from a more informed perspective.” Panelists also discussed opportunities to further strengthen the planning process. Potential solutions, as indicated by one panelist, include expanding coalition membership to worksites and other employers, and individuals and organizations funded to implement community health initiatives similar to workgroup goals and activities.

This unique and collaborative planning process shaped by Prevention Institute demonstrates tremendous opportunity to improve health and equity in the Antelope Valley. The efforts of the last year are significant in further establishing a collaborative, strategic and multi-sectored approach to build on the commitment in creating stronger, healthier community environments and sustainable prevention efforts in the Antelope Valley. Continued communications and spaces for the implementation of the strategies and activities developed can ensure that momentum for action is sustained and grows in the coming years to create a culture that advances health and equity across the region.